

4.0 URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT

4.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of the Urban Design Element is to provide the City with the policy design guidelines and implementation directive to shape the future image of the downtown. The desire to achieve an urban form and appearance which results in a visually distinctive downtown which sets Belmont apart from the El Camino Strip has been a common desire and thread running through all community discussions on the Plan. However, the important focus of the Urban Design Element is less on portraying an ideal image and more on defining a practical vision of a better looking downtown that can be implemented through available regulations, redevelopment, and capital improvements. Because the downtown is already developed, change will be gradual as old buildings are replaced with new; the process of image-building will be slow, as development conforms to design guidelines. In other areas, such as the Village Center, where imaginative development opportunities can be achieved through redevelopment, new development can have a striking, immediate impact on the appearance of downtown.

Urban design policies, while guiding change, are also intended to conserve what is valued today such as buildings with a historic character, established landmark trees and streetscapes, and building scale. Design policy also ensures mitigation of the possible adverse impacts of downtown development on surrounding neighborhoods by creating visual buffers, boundaries and transition zones.

In the proposed Village Center shopping area of the downtown, urban design policies are set forth to strengthen the pedestrian shopping environment, unify commercial activity, and enhance the attractiveness of the downtown to serve as a people-oriented place. These are contained in the Village Center Element.

4.2 REMAKING DOWNTOWN: A LONG TERM VISION WITH NEAR TERM REWARDS

4.2.1 Where Is Downtown?

The people of Belmont consistently express great pride and satisfaction with their community and the way it looks, except when referring to the downtown. Comments such as, "We need a clean sweep," or "Let's start over" speak to the frustration of creating order out of the fragmented pieces that loosely form the downtown today.

The past history of Belmont as a small community village, a stop-over along the railroad and El Camino Real, persists in the remaining wooden storefronts and "Queen Anne" bungalows,